

Interrogating Identity in the City of Chicago: Geography as Culture in Susan Power's *Roofwalker*

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Abstract:

Susan Power, in her work “Roofwalker”, includes narratives of both fiction and non-fiction, and these narratives primarily occur within the urban environment of Chicago. “Roofwalker” combines two genres of writing to develop and continue serious conversations about identity and past traumas within the United States and to create complicated depictions of living and existing as an Indigenous person and as a woman. This paper examines two stories in particular – the fictional “Roofwalker” and the non-fictional “Museum Indians” – both of which incorporate the city of Chicago as the homeplace of the respective main characters. In this paper, I will explore these two stories in order to demonstrate the complicated importance of geography in relation to culture, particularly regarding histories of forced relocation and imaginary boundaries. By focusing on the creation of home in Power’s work, I show how the urban Chicago setting of these two stories significantly impacts the characterization of the main characters and how they relate to their family and cultural history. In “Roofwalker” and “Museum Indians,” this conversation is told by looking at ways that geography and family coincide and conflict with one another. As the stories and histories are told there are no clear answers and there are no obvious solutions; however, this does not mean that the pieces are failed experiments. This paper shows how Power’s family histories are mimicked in her fiction, and this allows for a deeper look at how urban geography influences the way that Indigenous people write, speak, and think about their place in the United States, in their tribes, and in their communities.

Key Words: Indigenous, Native, Chicago, Susan Power, Homeplaces

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“I’ve always been Native first and American second ...” (Power 2017, 76). This quote comes from an essay written by Susan Power titled “Native in the Twenty-first Century,” in which Power asks what it means to be Native; particularly, what it means to be Native in a culture and place that denies Native peoples the ability to exist on their own terms. Complications arise when studying the relationship between urban environments and Indigenous identity.¹ Within dominant Western thinking there is a tendency to presume that reservations and tribal lands serve as the “only truly comfortable homes” of Native peoples in the United States, Canada, and elsewhere; thus, as Lindsey Claire Smith asserts: “urban environments have not been explored as having any particular cultural force or relevance for Indigenous-centered narratives or for scholarship” (2009, 144). Despite this, there is growing recognition that works written by Indigenous authors that take place in and interact with urban environments are significant.

Roofwalker also by Susan Power, is a collection of stories and histories that juxtaposes fictional and non-fictional writings. In the *Roofwalker* collection, Power demonstrates a nuanced understanding of identity, place, and community, as well as the complicated relationship Native tribes and peoples have with these concepts. Throughout the anthology, stories and histories are set in or reference both Chicago and tribal land in North and South Dakota. These two settings are simultaneously written as intimately connected and irrevocably fragmented. Power utilizes the physical differences between the two settings as well as the community aspect commonly associated with tribal lands to interrogate Native communities and identities in both her fiction and non-fiction. What Power does not do, however, is condemn urban environments; nor does she inherently praise tribal land. Such dichotomous thinking would be too simple for the reality of contemporary experience and sense of place. In this paper, I will explore two stories from *Roofwalker*, one fiction and one non-fiction, in order to demonstrate the complicated importance of geography in relation to culture, particularly regarding histories of forced relocation and imaginary boundaries. By focusing on the creation of home in Power's work, I show how the urban Chicago setting of these two stories significantly impacts the characterization of the main characters and how they relate to their family and cultural history.

Finding the "Roofwalker"

In "Roofwalker," the titular and opening story of Power's collection, "Grandma Mabel Rattles Chasing [comes] down from the Standing Rock Reservation in North Dakota to help deliver" the main character, who is born in Chicago—or, more specifically, "in [a] third-floor apartment, which was little more than a chain of narrow rooms resembling the cars of a train" (Power 2002, 5). To avoid having the past cruelties of the white hegemonic medical institution enacted upon her, the main character's mother

refuses to follow a hospital and doctor-centered path of childbirth. Instead, the birth of the main character is within the home, which returns childbearing to its original roots and allows the occasion to be a family affair. However, since the birth takes place in the city of Chicago rather than in the ancestral and current homeland of the family, the sense of displacement during the scene is heightened. This displacement is not meant to imply that the family is doomed due to their separation from the Dakotas nor is it meant to argue that life would have been better for the family if they had stayed on a reservation. Instead, as indicated by the narrator and unnamed protagonist, there is another specific reason for the mother having a home birth rather than giving birth in a hospital, intimately tied to the violence enacted upon Indigenous women on reservations, tribal lands, and beyond.

Although there is a contemporary trend wherein home births are on the rise for Non-Hispanic white women, this increase in popularity did not begin until 2004, two years after the publication of *Roofwalker*. Further, the rate of American Indian women having at-home births, according to the statistics from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has remained relatively stable between the years of 1990 and 2012 (MacDorman, Mathews, and Declercq 2014). These statistics are significant because they solidify the narrative's rejection of modern, white understandings of who is involved in childbirth, where childbirth takes place, and how it is conducted. Even though contemporary white elite women are creating subgroups that support and condone home births, the depiction in "Roofwalker" is not only a precursor to these prevalent subgroups, it also stems from a complicated and traumatic experience of institutions including the hospital. "Roofwalker" is decolonizing in its depiction of birth and explicitly addresses the symbolic and literal violence of the white medical institution against Sioux and other Indigenous women and families: "Grandma Mabel came to help with the delivery because my mother was terrified of going to the huge

maternity ward at Chicago's Cook County Hospital. She was convinced that the white doctors would sterilize her after she gave birth, a practice once routine at many reservation hospitals" (Power 2002, 5). The main character's mother is haunted by the traumatic history of violence enacted upon the Sioux people, which follows her throughout her life and in all the geographical spaces that she occupies.

Christopher B. Teuton, in a theory of Indigenous literature that borrows from W.E.B. Dubois, identifies three geographical spaces in which Indigenous literature takes place: the Symbolic City, the Symbolic Center, and the Symbolic Reservation (Teuton 2009, 45-64). Within Teuton's theory each of these three geographical spaces interact in special ways; Teuton asserts,

The following symbolic geography of Indigenous narratives situates Indigenous experience within two poles, the Symbolic Center and the Symbolic City, which are mediated by a third space, the Symbolic Reservation. The quest for an individual and communal voice that is in conversation with both Indigenous traditions and Western modernity is developed through negotiating this symbolic geography, which illuminates fundamental issues in contemporary Indigenous experience. (Teuton 2009, 46)

Within these three spaces, the Symbolic Reservation is never an untarnished or uncorrupted space. Instead, the Symbolic Reservation is "a site where Indigenous and Western cultural values contest each other in an Indigenous communal context," and although "the Symbolic Reservation exists most obviously on reserves, reservations, and tribal lands in Indigenous literature," the entirety of "North America ... is a site of the Symbolic Reservation, as it is comprised of Indigenous land differentiated only by the degree to which its title is contested by colonial and Indigenous national governments" (Teuton 2009, 50). As mentioned, the Symbolic Reservation exists between the Symbolic Center, which is "both a literal place and a psychic space" that serves as "the space from which a people originate and continue to self-define through

culturally specific patterns of thought,” and the Symbolic City, which is “not limited to actual urban space” but rather is “expressed whenever and wherever characters engage the colonialism of the West and its supporting values of modernity” (Teuton 2009, 48-49). All of this is significant as it provides, for Indigenous literature and the scholars of this literature, a theory that stresses the inaccuracy of identifying reservations and tribal lands as places of unquestioned tribal sovereignty or as areas that can avoid entirely Western influence and the traumas of colonialism. Power’s “Roofwalker,” while avoiding an uncomplicated or outright praising of urban environments, indicates the multiplicity of identity and space through the reference to various issues that occur in all geographical spaces regardless of their legal categories.

Urban environments and reservations or tribal lands, in both the fiction and non-fiction of Power, are never entirely separated from one another, and to be in an urban setting does not inherently separate one from an Indigenous identity or community. As Smith indicates, “Indigenous governments have a stake in what happens in cities for many reasons: large numbers of members are located there; negotiations with provincial, state, and federal governments usually occur there; and cities often span traditional Indigenous homelands, which, in their natural features, may have spiritual and historical significance” (Smith 2009, 151). The lines that separate land legally deemed the property of sovereign tribes from the land legally deemed owned by the United States government are not clear-cut. The communal and spiritual history of Indigenous people does not and cannot abide by legally constructed geography, especially when this legal construction is overseen by colonizing forces.

In this vein, Grandma Mabel’s presence embodies the complicated dichotomy of constructed geography versus the reality of how people and cultures move throughout the world. Grandma Mabel, the only named character in the story, serves as the conduit through which access to the reservation and the past, present, and

language of the Sioux is granted to the main character. Furthermore, the naming of Grandma Mabel—specifically the fact that she is given a full name and not just a relationship marker—indicates the main character sees Grandma Mabel as her own person with a life and existence that goes beyond her relationship with her granddaughter. Grandma Mabel is presented as an individual and a powerful one at that, while simultaneously representing the main character's desire to maintain a connection to the Sioux culture and history of her family.

The main character of "Roofwalker" is, of course, physically separated from the Dakotas, the Sioux tribe, and her grandmother. However, even though this separation is deliberate on the part of her father and mother, who moved for her father's career writing "proposals for the Indian community," the separation is always at the forefront of the story and is difficult to bear (Power 2002, 9). Furthermore, the physical separation is underscored by the visible manifestation of the main character's separation from her family and heritage. As described in the legend detailing the main character's birth:

As far back as anyone in my family could remember, both sides were Indian—full-blood Sioux on my mother's side and full-blood Sioux on my dad's. Yet I was born with red hair the color of autumn maple leaves. Grandma Mabel looked at me sideways and began to recite stories of the Viking invaders. (Power 2002, 6)

From birth, the red hair of the main character serves as a visible manifestation of the main character's confusion about her own identity. Despite her parents both being "full-blood Sioux," the main character, when examining the woman her father is leaving her mother for, observes, "She's only a part-blood Indian, like me" (Power 2002, 6,12). It does not matter that it is scientifically impossible for her to be only part-blood while her parents are both full-blood; what matters instead is that she is the one with the hair that marks her physically as "other."

The story itself, however, does not depict the main character as someone who exists outside the Sioux tribe or outside her family. Regardless of the red hair—which is as much a haunting of the family in its entirety as it is a haunting of the main character—her primary characteristic is her hunger for her own heritage and the stories of her grandmother. As Grandma Mabel educates the main character about the Sioux traditions, histories, and language, the protagonist not only listens intently, but also unquestioningly believes, in the stories she hears from her grandmother. It is significant that Grandma Mabel implies it is the main character's father—not she herself—who is “truly lost”, because he, like many others, “try too hard; they think they've found the old-time trail leading them to the heart of our traditions, but if they looked down, I think they would see only their footprints” (Power 2002, 10). Rather than the main character being the one who is isolated from her familial past and heritage, it is her father who is seen as “lost” due to his inability to understand where he comes from and how he should live his life. Moreover, although her father is “lost,” it is because Sioux and other Indigenous peoples “have gone through many things, and now it's difficult to find the right road.” It is not because he has willfully denied his family or shown any animosity toward them (Power 2002, 10). Even the main character's mother explains his leaving by saying: “Just because your father took off on some crazy adventure doesn't mean he stopped caring about us. He's just mixed up. He thinks he's doing the right thing, but he's forgetting that a Sioux man's first duty is to his family” (Power 2002, 21). Still, although the father believes he is leaving to “make a difference” by “going back to his own reservation in South Dakota,” the effects of his leaving are immediate and damaging to the family he leaves behind (Power 2002, 11).

The main legend told by Grandma Mabel concerns the roofwalker, “the hungriest of all [Sioux] spirits” who “lived to eat dreams, and when he feasted on the dream of his choice, it always came true” (Power 2002, 24). The roofwalker, as the title

of the short story suggests, becomes the most significant manifestation in the story due to the narrator's equation of the roofwalker with her father. When she first sees the roofwalker with her own eyes, she describes him: "I wasn't surprised that he looked just like my father, although his thick waist-length hair was trimmed with feathers. The handsome face and the strong arms and torso were my father's. Only the legs were different" (Power 2002, 26). Despite not having any physical evidence of the spirit's presence in Chicago, the protagonist cannot find it in herself to doubt the reality of what she sees and the "family legends" that are recited by Grandma Mabel (Power 2002, 26-27). She has direct access, through her own faith and her own belief, to the stories of her grandmother, particularly that of the roofwalker which plays out in the rest of the story through her attempts to interact with the spirit and the memory of her father.

While the main character's two younger brothers (twins) feel the effects of their father leaving as well, the focus remains on her and her mother. She explains, "That week my mother became her own ghost, and I became more real," signaling a shift in the dynamics of the home as the main character is forced to serve as caregiver to her two brothers and her mother due to the absence of her father (Power 2002, 16). Both at the outset of the story and at its conclusion, the main character falls. The first fall occurs at her birth when her grandmother sees the red hair that marks her as other: "What she saw made her scream, and I slipped out of her fingers like buttered dough. My father caught me. He went down on one knee, and his slim hands with long fingers stretched beneath me like a net" (Power 2002, 6). The second fall, which ends the narrative, mirrors the first; however, the outcome of the second fall is dependent upon the careful reading of the text. The concluding paragraph narrates another fall from "somewhere high enough to test faith, but not so high as to be dangerous" (Power 2002, 27). As she explains, the fall is meant to call the father back to the family—the main character is

attempting to use her “blind faith in family legends” to prove to herself that her father can and will be returned to her (Power 2002, 26-27). However, the narration holds within it the caveat that this “blind faith” was held by the main character “when [she] was little,” implying that she either grew out of the belief or, at least, became more skeptical of some aspects of the stories and her father’s return (Power 2002, 26). Though subtle, this phrase signals that the second fall, unlike the first, did not end with the main character safe in her father’s arms. In this instance, the main character is ultimately safe from extensive physical harm, as she carefully considered where the fall would take place, but this is due to her own actions and not those of her family or her father.

Despite the subtle clues that the fall did, in fact, occur and the main character was not saved by her father or the roofwalker, who represent the same being in her psyche, it would be irresponsible to disregard the ambiguity of the story’s ending line: “I waited for Dad to catch me, for the roofwalker to throw back his head and open his mouth, letting my dream float up from his throat into the breeze rolling away from Lake Michigan” (Power 2002, 27). The image one is left with is not a failing or broken child who has come to realize her father will not return to her. In fact, whether the main character is caught by her father/the roofwalker is not the point. Rather, what matters is the main character’s dedication to her heritage and her family. As mentioned above, her mother explains to her after her father leaves, “he’s forgetting that a Sioux man’s first duty is to his family” (Power 2002, 21). Although her mother uses the male gender as a qualifier in this statement, the main character embodies the sentiment; at the loss of her father, when her mother must grieve and subsequently leave the household to provide, the main character serves as the new caretaker in more ways than one. She is simultaneously the mother and the father of the home, the solid ground on which the

family stands, and most importantly the conduit to the larger history of her family and tribe.

Her sincere and continued belief in the roofwalker and other stories told to her by her grandmother gives her strength and fuels her visions of herself. She is able, through her knowledge of her grandmother's stories, to enact revenge (albeit imaginary) upon her father's girlfriend, whom she sees as the catalyst of his leaving: "I wished I could become a bird of vengeance. I curled my toes inside my sneakers, feeling their terrible grip, and imagined the fierce sweep they would make at that part-blood girl's hair" (Power 2002, 13). Key to this statement is when she addresses her father's girlfriend as "that part-blood girl," implying a distaste for her lack of full-blood heritage alongside the bitterness that comes from her father's impending departure. Despite her earlier assertion that she too is "part-blood" due to her red hair, or perhaps because of that fact, she now separates herself from the girlfriend with this later assertion (Power 2002, 12, 13). Furthermore, it is significant that she pictures the first attack being inflicted specifically upon the hair of the girlfriend. When she identifies the girlfriend as "part-blood," the only clue provided to the reader about the appearance of the girlfriend is that her eyes are "muddy green ... the color of the Chicago River" (Power 2002, 12). Likewise, the main character casually refers to the red color of the girlfriend's hair throughout the short story.

As mentioned, the red hair of the main character creates a physical appearance that does not match stereotypical depictions of those of Sioux descent, particularly those deemed "full-blood." This explains the main character's ability to look at the girlfriend and automatically determine that she is "part-blood." However, the main character reveals her own insecurity when she first identifies herself in the same category then imagines a violent reaction to the girlfriend that involves a direct attack on the girlfriend's hair. The main character's decision to target the hair of her father's

girlfriend signals a conflation between the color of her hair and her father's abandonment of his family. Throughout the short story, the narrator displays negative emotions (albeit in subtle ways) when referring to her hair. She calls the color of her hair a *burden*, one that the rest of her family does not have to bear (Power 2002, 8). Nevertheless, except for the incident that occurs at her birth when Grandma Mabel almost drops her from shock, the other characters who interact with her red hair seem more in awe or indifferent to it. Even the girlfriend does not recognize the main character upon seeing her, asking, "Which one are you?" (Power 2002, 12). Instead of being able to tell by the color of the main character's hair which child she is, the girlfriend seems unable to see a difference among the protagonist and her siblings. Such a question would not be necessary if her red hair automatically gave her away, or if the red of her hair had been a point of conversation between the father and his girlfriend. In fact, the father himself seems unconcerned with her hair from the beginning. He writes it off as "different," but does not go as far as Grandma Mabel, who calls it "the color of the devil" (Power 2002, 6). As the story progresses, however, both the main character's mother and Grandma Mabel grow accustomed to the red hair of the main character, going as far as to explicitly compliment or lovingly touch the hair. When her mother is explaining the new responsibilities the main character must undertake due to the absence of her father, she becomes distracted by the red hair: "She leaned against me to bury her face in my hair. 'Boy, it sure smells sweet,' Mom said, 'and it's real pretty. Always was pretty'" (Power 2002, 21). In fact, the main character's mother compares the red color of the hair to "Black Hills Gold," stating, "Three different colors woven together" (Power 2002, 21). The red color of the main character's hair is thus redefined as the narrative progresses to be representative of a sacred landscape rather than of any separation between her physical appearance and her identity as Sioux. Likewise, when Grandma Mabel first tells the main character about the roofwalker the

narration draws attention to her red hair once more: “‘Yes, he did,’ she said. She smoothed the hair off my forehead. ‘I dreamed you’” (Power 2002, 25). In this case the main character’s hair is neither a burden nor a curse for the family, rather she is the fulfillment of her grandmother’s dream.

Overall, the main character of “Roofwalker” displays a desire to return to her heritage and be connected to the stories of her grandmother. Prior to her father’s leaving, she does so out of a desire to grow closer to her grandmother. She stresses the importance of Grandma Mabel throughout the narration. It is Grandma Mabel who “was a presence in [her] life even though she returned to the reservation shortly after” her birth (Power 2002, 5, 7). Without Grandma Mabel, she would never have learned the language of her Sioux tribe. Though Grandma Mabel is only physically present for a short time, passing on the Sioux language and tradition is a priority. As she tours the home of her granddaughter she points to and identifies items around the home using the Sioux language, teaching the protagonist (Power 2002, 22). Despite the light tone of the scene, the image shows a duality in the main character’s identity, and a connection that she has to her family that her brothers, at least textually, lack. She is being groomed by her grandmother to take on the position of matriarch, as she is the one being taught the stories and language that she must pass down as it was passed down to her.

Finding the Real Chicago

Moving from the fictional narrative of “Roofwalker” to the nonfiction piece “Museum Indians,” Power writes about regularly visiting the museum in Chicago. The museum, Power explains, has within it her “great-grandmother’s buckskin dress,” and Power and her mother visit this dress to pay their respects (Power 2002, 163). Her mother, while looking at a Picasso painting, states, “He did this during his blue period,” and Power

subsequently implies that the visits to the museum put her mother in a similar “blue period” as she is forced to see family belongings placed in an exhibit that neither accurately describes the life of her great-grandmother nor pays tribute to Indigenous ways of life (Power 2002, 162). Due to this, and due to a narration that focuses in on the mother’s grief in the city, it seems that there is a feeling of regret in the mother at leaving her family’s home and settling down in Chicago. Furthermore, Power recounts her mother’s interactions with a buffalo near the buckskin dress, which she talks to periodically on her visits; ““You don’t belong here,”“ her mother says, ““I am just like you, ... ‘I don’t belong here either. We should be in the Dakotas, somewhere a little bit east of the Missouri River. This crazy city is not a fit home for buffalo or Dakotas” (Power 2002, 164). Her mother has a complicated relationship with the environment in which she lives; more specifically, the urban environment. Power, however, is rooted in the urban city of Chicago. The story ends with her explaining, “I take my mother’s hand to hold her in place. I am a city child, nervous around livestock and lonely on the plains. I am afraid of a sky without light pollution—I never knew there could be so many stars. I lead my mother from the museum so she will forget the sense of loss. ... I introduce my mother to the city she gave me. I call her home” (Power 2002, 164-165). Power’s story does not reveal a girl who is desperate to reconnect with her homeland. She feels connected to her homeland because her homeland is not the Dakotas but, rather, Chicago.

As Teuton states, “It is within the Symbolic Reservation that new, alternative narratives to the discourses of colonial dominance and Western modernity may be imagined and put to use” (Teuton 2009, 50). In both “Museum Indians” and “Roofwalker” the protagonist—whether it be the unnamed main character of “Roofwalker” or Power in the nonfiction “Museum Indians”—exists in the space of the Symbolic Reservation. The Symbolic Reservation, Teuton insists, can only be used

effectively when “characters ... become fluent in the languages of both the Symbolic Center and the Symbolic City, moving back and forth between cultural locations and vocabularies” (Teuton 2009, 53). In “Museum Indians,” Power proves fluent in both of these symbolic geographical locations. She, like her mother, feels connected to a larger identity. She serves as her mother’s “small shadow and witness,” and she attends a number of events with her mother that center around Indigenous political rights and freedoms (Power 2002, 161). Although Power describes herself as “the timid daughter who can rage only on paper,” she is always depicted as proud of where she has come from and aware of her own complicated relationship with the world around her (Power 2002, 161). Likewise, in “Roofwalker,” the unnamed protagonist, despite her love of her grandmother and her grandmother’s stories, can be a part of the stories and legends within the city; she does not have to return to tribal lands for her connection to be strong. Instead, as mentioned earlier, the roofwalker and other characters from her grandmother’s stories come to her (Power 2002, 5-27). As Powers claims in “Native in the Twenty-First Century,” the presence (or absence) of the roofwalker and other spirits in her stories do not make them more or less realistic: “It’s not ‘magical realism’ to see how time resists those easy straight lines. Can’t you see how the past shapes the present and the future? How we live what our grandfathers said and our grandmothers sang?” (Power 2017, 76). Seeing “how the past shapes the present and the future” is the key to both “Museum Indians” and “Roofwalker,” particularly with a focus on communal ties that are created through familial bonds and shared heritage.

Mishuana Goeman, in “(Re)Mapping Indigenous Presence on the Land in Native Women’s Literature,” explains, “critical Native feminisms will reassess and assert spatial practices that address colonial mappings of bodies and land and remap our social and political lives according to cultural values and contemporary need” (Goeman 2008, 295). Although Goeman primarily discusses Esther Berlin’s work,

Power likewise attempts to “(re)map” the geographies in her writing in her collection *Roofwalker* and elsewhere. In “Museum Indians,” Power claims that the city “belongs to” her because she had free range within it as a child (Power 2002, 161). Similarly, the main character of “Roofwalker,” claims ownership of the Chicago home in which she resides. She does not appear frequently outside of this home and within it she grows, develops, and learns. Each story, thus, provides female characters an ownership of the settings around them, and in both stories the female characters (in the case of “Museum Indians,” the only characters) take charge of the narrative. There is no question of their agency. Despite the seemingly stereotypical setting of the home in “Roofwalker,” and the focus on the mother’s place in it, it is the power of Grandma Mabel and the events that conclude the story, which lead the protagonist to learn to have faith in herself. That she does not rely on her father or another male figure allows for a redrawing of social norms and traditions that place women in a position of prominence.

What Power calls for in both stories as well as the entirety of her *Roofwalker* collection, is what Teuton also describes in his theory of symbolic geographies and what other Native scholars call for in their work as well: a new way of shaping Indigenous identity that incorporates an understanding of how colonizing forces have influenced and continue to influence every corner of the world. However, the call includes a demand that this identity not disavow the traditional aspects of various Indigenous cultures, and not ignore the colonialization and westernization of concepts and spaces. To rethink and reshape an identity should not mean ignoring, forgiving, or forgetting past traumatic experiences. Power’s work manages to fulfill the above demands, particularly through her tendency to approach uncomfortable topics about identity and place in her work, and her inclusion of unanswerable questions, particularly when these questions involve what it means to be Native and how one can

both fit into Indigenous modes of being, while not ignoring the violence and change brought about by colonization.

In “Roofwalker,” the indeterminate conclusion creates ambiguity in the story, as a sign of the success of the protagonist. She remains always in both worlds: the world of Chicago and the world of “family legend” (Power 2002, 27). This enables the retention of her heritage and the Sioux culture of her family while also allowing her to come to terms with her own identity; in a way forgiving herself for the color of her hair and accepting her father’s abandonment. Without the crisis that results in her fall at the end of the story there would be no moving past the traumatic experience of her youth. The “test[ing of] faith” that occurs is less about the outcome, as stated earlier, than it is a testing of herself and her dedication and trust in the roofwalker and Grandma Mabel. On the surface it may seem to break or reveal broken familial ties with the father, as he is not there to catch her, but upon further examination this fall simply offers closure on that section of her life, which in turn opens new opportunities.

New opportunities are also a big part of “Museum Indians.” Power is unlike her mother; she does not see herself as the loud and powerful political force that her mother embodies. Rather, she “rage[s] only on paper” (Power 2002, 161). There is no indication that either her mother’s or her own method is the better option. Power lovingly describes the actions of her mother and idolizes her for not only the life she has given her and also the life she leads herself. “She is so tall, a true Dakota woman; she rises against the sun like a skyscraper,”... “and when I draw her picture in my notebook, she takes up the entire page” (Power 2002, 161). In the narrative, Power seems, at first, to discount or at least belittle her ability to only show her anger and emotions in writing rather than in person, as her mother does. However, the simple fact that her “raging” is eventually published and read by Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers alike reveals the decolonizing power of writing. Two paths of resistance are

presented within the text, and the fact that neither is prioritized is significant. No one form of decolonization is privileged as greater, or more powerful, than the other. Each is necessary to successfully navigate Teuton's Symbolic Reservation (Teuton 2009, 53).

Claire Lyndsey Smith reminds those studying Indigenous literature in North America that "there is no 'post' to the colonized status of Indigenous nations within North America" (Smith 2009, 147). As anyone who claims to be a scholar of Native Studies must keep in mind, occupation of the land that once rightfully belonged to various tribes of Indigenous peoples continues to this day without an end in sight. Tribal sovereignty is never a guarantee and can be dissolved at any time, although pushback and resistance would obviously occur. Just as "there is no 'post,'" "there also is no going back, no pure and untainted return. Instead, what Power provides in her collection of what she terms "Stories and Histories", and what is often directly called for or hinted at in most Native Studies scholarship, is a combination of resistance and acknowledgement of the above facts.

How Power comes to this conclusion, and what is displayed in "Museum Indians" and "Roofwalker," comes primarily from in-depth and complex negotiations of community and belonging. As discussed throughout this paper, familial ties and familial relationships are emphasized in the two pieces, mostly because it is through these familial ties that community and belonging is established in relation to Indigenous culture. However, this is not and cannot be separated from the spatial aspects of community and the effect of geography on family and culture. Power in "Museum Indians" is, in fact, a "city child" (Power 2002, 164). The geography and the psychological location where Power feels comfortable is Chicago, and not the Standing Rock Reservation where her mother was born (Power 2002, 161). Her mother feels a disconnect with the place that surrounds her that she herself does not, and this results

in Power feeling as though it is her responsibility to ensure that her mother is happy within the city (Power 2002, 162). Nevertheless, this does not mean that Power does not see the colonizing aspects of her home, even at a young age. Rather it is a recognition that home and location are not permanently tied and that Indigenous identity is not rooted in the physical space that one calls home. Still, Power grew up in Chicago because her mother came in search of work, and it is made clear that the financial situation that Power and her mother found themselves in was not one of wealth or even comfort. Although her mother did the best she could according to Power, it is clear from the narration that times were hard in terms of finances, both on and off the reservation (Power 2002, 161-162). Just as it was for the protagonist of “Roofwalker,” Power’s childhood and the physical location of that childhood is determined directly by monetary needs of the family, decisions of the parent(s), and the direct targeting of Indigenous people for (usually) lower paying jobs in the city.

The geography of “Roofwalker” is likewise significant because it keeps the protagonist’s relationship with her grandmother from developing as completely as it could if they lived in the same space. When Grandma Mabel is visiting the family, as discussed earlier in the paper, the grandmother and granddaughter can enact a relationship centered on teaching and learning, particularly the learning of language (Power 2002, 22-24). While there is the possibility that some teaching could be done over the phone when they call one another, the main character displays regret that the phone calls can never last as long as she would want them to (Power 2002, 8). The physical distance between the two characters directly affects their ability to interact with one another as they would if they were within the same space.

Physical geography, therefore, does effect community and belonging in the narratives through its interference in the relationships of characters and their ability to understand or be near one another. This cannot be avoided, even within Power’s fiction,

and the borders and boundaries of these geographical spaces are highlighted by the tense and ever-changing political relationship between the sovereign nations and tribes (some but not all federally recognized) within the United States and the United States government, which historically ignored and abused Indigenous nations and peoples. Thus, in the fiction and nonfiction of Power, geography, politics, and interpersonal relationships all combine, to create convoluted understandings of community, particularly for Indigenous communities that operate on all of these levels while widely being viewed (if inaccurately) as an ever-diminishing minority population.

The protagonist of “Roofwalker” certainly struggles with her own identity in its many forms: as a red-headed Sioux, as a daughter to her father and mother; as a granddaughter; as an Indigenous girl growing up in Chicago. All of these identities conflate, mesh, and counter one another in ways that prove the impossibility of self-definition in homogenous terms. Power, herself, deals with this because she is both Dakota on her mother’s side and white European on her father’s: “[I] felt like a Dakota spy perched at my listening post to gather information on what the dominant society *really* felt about us, whatever term it is we’re using now, ‘minorities,’ ‘people of color,’ the tired, inadequate labels that obliterate the rich histories of America’s other-class citizens” (Power 2017, 76). If the protagonist of “Roofwalker” did not have red hair, or if Power did not have a white father and a Dakota mother, community and identity would still be just as intense and complex a question, but it is through the manifestations of the multiplicity of identity that the stories and histories of Power’s collection underscore just how ambiguous community can be.

Power’s attempts, in *Roofwalker*, to combine fiction and non-fiction in a way that develops and continues serious conversations about identity and past traumas within the United States creates complicated depictions of living and existing as an Indigenous person and as a woman. In “Roofwalker” and “Museum Indians,” she

examines the ways that geography and family coincide and conflict with one another. Stories and histories are told, but there are no clear answers and there are no obvious solutions. A part conclusion offered by Power is that there is more than one way to live and there is more than one place. Community becomes communities; physical communities, cultural communities, and more. In Power's fiction and non-fiction there is a plethora of ties that people create with the areas and communities that surround them. Power shows in her family histories the reality that she mimics in her fiction, and this provides a deeper look at how urban geography influences the way that Indigenous people write, speak, and think about their place in the United States, in their tribes, and in their communities.

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¹ For more on this topic, see Bonita Lawrence, *"Real" Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Lincoln: U. of Nebraska P., 2004); Coll Thrush, *Native Seattle: Histories from the Crossing-Over Place* (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 2008); and Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism* (Minneapolis: U. of Minneapolis P., 1999).